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MAC GEE, pseud

Rusticus, pseud

Bucolic beatitudes

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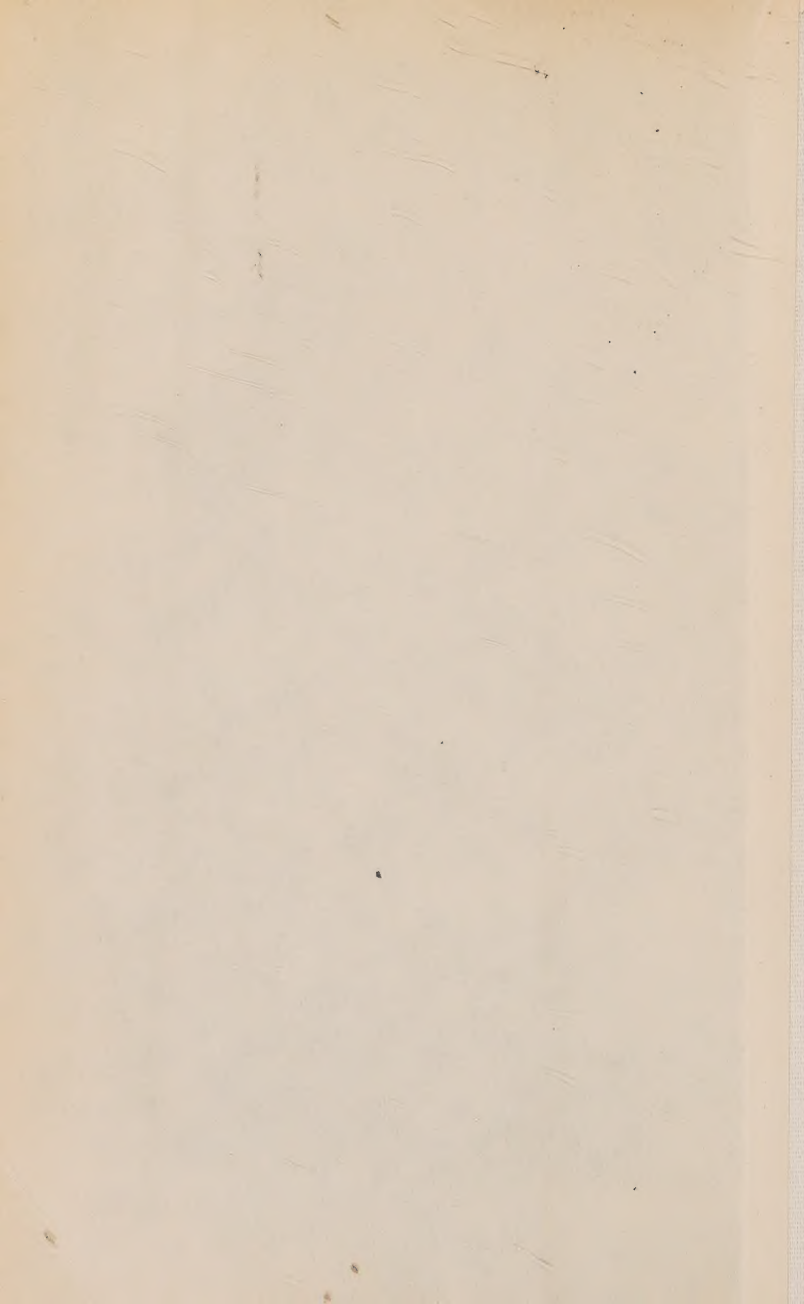
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BUCOLIC BEATITUDES



# BUCOLIC BEATITUDES

BY

*RUSTICUS*

(JENKINS, Mac GREGOR)



ILLUSTRATED BY

DECIE MERWIN

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*To My Wife  
who lets me do these things*



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BLESSED BE THE DOG





## BLESSED BE THE DOG

MY dog has but one eye. He was the beginning of things. Just how far he has controlled my destiny, just how far he has shaped the lives of those about him, will never be known until the dull human mind has evolved a keener perception of the real values of life and has learned to become conscious of influences too subtle to be recognized by man in his present fallen estate. This is certain: he was the beginning of things. It was he who opened the door and led the way.

I have always felt that I owe that dog an apology which only a life of devotion

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can express. The bitter truth is — I bought him. What I paid for him is one of those personal secrets which will remain locked in my bosom to the end of time. It is one of those sacred things that even an Internal Revenue Inspector must dismiss in reverent awe, and the Head of the Household must rest content with the explanation that there are but two hidden things in my life: one is the price paid for the dog in question and the other is the extent of my devotion to my wife. After the matter is presented in these terms, further inquiry seems indelicate.

But the bitter fact remains — I did buy him. A dog should never be purchased, should never be made the subject of barter and dickering. A dog may be rescued from abuse, he may be bestowed and accepted as a gift, he may be borrowed and never returned, he may be found and kept, and, in cases of real necessity, he may be stolen in a dignified manner; but he should never be bought. I have heard of men who make a livelihood from the purchase and sale of dogs. I can conceive of them as good hus-

## BLESSED BE THE DOG

bands and kind fathers, but they still seem to me inhuman monsters, engaged in a sinister traffic.

There seems to be one relationship in a social structure now completely dissected and exposed under the microscope of social investigators, which remains inviolate — a relationship which owes its immunity from investigators to the stupidity characteristic of investigators who ignore the significant and tear the obvious and unimportant into worthless tatters. That relationship is the profoundly significant one existing between a good, bad, or indifferent child and a dog.

With what wealth of ritual do we bestow a name upon a child; with what ecstasies of formality do we celebrate her taking a mate; and yet with what casual indifference do we give that child the first dog! We create a contact — as our scientific friends like to call it — the importance of which no one can conjecture, with a callous unconcern that is the only proper measure of our ignorance.

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Here if anywhere is an excuse for formality and the most elaborate and significant ritual. Here is a real chance for genuine good cheer and the sincerest merrymaking, quite unlike that forced and somewhat doubting hilarity that characterizes the average marriage-feast. For in this case we perform the one act allowed us in this earthly pilgrimage in which we are sure to be right: we cannot make a mistake. And certainly when that crowning moment of our existence comes — when as in the fairy tale we make the one wish allowed us — we should do it with a high degree of decorum and with all decent elaboration of detail.

I say we cannot make a mistake — I mean from the child's standpoint. We may create a relationship trying to the dog, by giving him to a very inferior child upon whom he must lavish years of loving instruction before improvement appears, but we cannot hurt the child by giving him a bad dog, for the simple reason that there is no such thing, broadly speaking, as a bad dog.

## BLESSED BE THE DOG

There is the occasional dog, of course, who has not withstood the corrupting influences of human associations as well as his more fortunate brothers, but even he is vastly better than no dog at all.

And once the contact made, the relationship established, what unlimited vistas of speculation lie temptingly before the reflective mind! Those two little figures on the hearthrug — one in the image of man, one showing the sleek and perfect lines of a half-wild creature. Two heads together — one of tousled gold, the other close-cropped and tapering to nostrils of nervous sensitiveness; a relaxed and callous paw held firmly in a dimpled human hand. What are they saying to each other? What lies back of those limpid canine eyes, half closed to the glare and warmth of the hearthstone? Something is going on between them, some delicate transmission of emotion, thought, or stimulus, which we know is infinitely good for the soul of the child and we can hope does no harm to the dog.

An unfamiliar footstep is heard, and the

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picture changes. The relaxed and languid creature is transformed in an instant from a musing, tolerant playmate to a bristling bundle of potential destruction. He stands, alert and vibrant, muscles tense, set for any contingency, ready for any emergency and any sacrifice. The emergency passes, and with an apologetic shake to relieve the tension of his muscles and a half-sneeze to clear the dryness of expectant fangs, he settles once more upon the hearthrug, to resume his mystic communion with the only person in the household with whom he is on terms of complete mutual understanding.

These are the perfect hours of childhood and doghood. They pass, like all perfect things, and are followed by long hours of separation, while the child is absent in one of those institutions ingeniously contrived to remove him from the priceless opportunities of improvement in the society of a dog and to lighten the duties of idle parents, in exchange for a fleeting familiarity with what is cryptically called the "l.c.d." And while the child is incarcerated in one of

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those centres of juvenile infection what prodigies of patience does the dog perform!

In my own case there happen to be two avenues of return from these dreary absences, and for long before the hour of arrival they must be watched. Owing to the entire absence of one eye this is a delicate operation, but Cerberus has found one point where with the least muscular exertion he can sweep his tiny horizon with his one remaining eye. And so he waits — not with the imbecile nervous tension and restless pacing of his master, but relaxed and resting.

Suddenly he becomes alert. The peculiar rattle of a certain rear wheel on a certain automobile is recognized by those miraculous ears long before the solitary eye can see the car. He is off — the long vigil is over. Once more life is sweet and full of interest and adventure.

It is idle to prate of the lessons he teaches. They have been told and retold. Patience, loyalty, devotion — we know them all. It is in the finer shades of his relationship with

## BUCOLIC BEATITUDES

those about him that his quality appears. His is a wonderful life. Countless hours are spent in investigation. Every nook and cranny, every tree and every stone, every dark and mysterious hole, every living creature in pasture, garden, or stable must be run to earth. What sort of data is he gathering, I wonder? What use does he make of it? I do not know; but it is being stored away and tabulated for future reference in a vastly more usable and convenient form than any card index devised by the bungling brain of his master.

These are the busy hours of dog life. How often we encounter him bent on some important errand! I have a friend, the only adult I ever met who really knows a dog — and by the same token he is that rare thing, the gentleman. He too enjoys a long and solitary tramp, and he often meets on the highways and in the wood paths his various canine acquaintances bent on matters of importance. He makes a practice of saluting them with a cordial but respectful “Good morning” or “Good afternoon,”

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with perhaps a passing allusion to the fine weather. This by way of tribute to a fellow creature with mutual tastes.

But Cerberus knows that all work and no play is a dangerous method of life, and so hours are devoted to recreation. The duties of guardianship and the demands of education are laid aside, and he shows us how to play. Madly, intently, with no thought of appearances, he rushes into play, preferably with others but alone if necessary; and the simplest things suffice — a stick, a stone, a floating bit of feather is all he needs. No elaborate toy, no calculated programme, no long planning, no arguments and disagreements as to the *terminus ad quem*, resulting in half-hearted enjoyment or utter boredom (the usual result of human recreations), nothing but utter abandonment to the pleasure of the moment. I envy Cerberus his play more than I ever envied my neighbor's laboriously acquired and oppressive wealth.

Play over, then comes rest — rest as complete and perfect as the play. Stretched on

## BUCOLIC BEATITUDES

the grass or before the fire, relaxed and languid, every muscle slack and every nerve quiet, he sinks to slumber profound and absolute. Sometimes a bit of joyous memory steals into his slumbering mind; an ear will cock, a paw will twitch, but for an instant, and he is again at perfect peace.

Then the call will come. Duty summons in the form of some sound inaudible to human ears, some suspicious odor too delicate to disturb a human nostril, and he is up. Back in harness, recreated, rested, ready for any demand upon that marvelous supply of nervous energy. And a neurasthenic generation wonders at it, while Cerberus patiently tries to teach by actual practice the simplest rudiments of health to a stupid and inattentive class of grown-up dunces.

That much vaunted and greatly over-estimated thing called intellectual life, which humans use as a convenient excuse for all sorts of self-indulgence, is to Cerberus only the nice adjustment of dog data, knowledge, and experience to the needs of his complex relationships with those about him. These

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adjustments are delicate and intricate, for Cerberus lives, moves, and has his being, not in a world of understanding fellow-dogs, but with creatures duller than he and filled with every form of prejudice and conceit. Add to this the fact that these same folk represent to him not men and women, but for all practical purposes of immediate recognition and other important dog-matters nothing more nor less than a moving forest of male and female legs. How would you prosper, my proud dog-baiting relative, if your point of view was from eight to fifteen inches above ground, and if your horizon line could be extended beyond a few paltry yards only by a painful lifting of the head or the securing of some vantage point for observation? I fear, my friend, you would cut a much sadder figure than Cerberus at his worst.

And so his days pass. They are full of work and rest and play and, above all, a constant effort to square his dog mind to a man world. He does it pretty well; he does it better, on the whole, than man

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squares his to a God-made world. At least, his effort seems more sincere, his attitude vastly more dignified and honest.

The day's work is over. Childish hands are clasped in slumber, maternal cares are soothed in the first sweet sleep of night, and paternal irritabilities are in the process of partial elimination by pipe and book and armchair and open fire.

Cerberus lies with his head across his master's foot, a convenient arrangement allowing contact to replace sight on the blind side; and the seeing side commands the door. The autumn wind sways bare branches against the tiny house. Faint odors of apples and other products of the little farm seep up from the cellar, where in modest store they flank the winter's firewood piled in orderly array. The year is dying. Cerberus stirs in his sleep. I lay my hand upon his lean side. I pause to feel the rapid beating of his little heart, scarcely slowed at all, even in sleep. Would that some power could slow it down; it will wear out all too soon — and then!

## BLESSED BE THE DOG

A door creaks. He rises; no bristling fury, no growling menace, only an orderly and methodical investigation of every corner of the room and hall. Then a dignified return and sleep resumed. A subtle compliment to his master's competence, a mere gesture of coöperation with a trusted superior — this is one of those delicate adjustments of dog life to a man-made world. Of these Cerberus is a past master.

He sleeps. His "trusted superior" glances at the title of the book he reads and lays it on the table. No need to read now, when Cerberus teaches. The book is a scholarly treatise on *The Mastery of Nerves*.





BLESSED BE THE PIG





## BLESSED BE THE PIG

MY neighbor has many broad acres upon which he pays the taxes and over which I ride and walk — an admirable arrangement. He likes to pay taxes and I like to ride where the footing is soft and the paths are shaded. This is only one of the many advantages which I possess in having so amiable and excellent a man for a neighbor.

To be sure, his orbit is a bit more extended than mine, and we meet but seldom. He nevertheless adds enormously to my pleasure, for his manner of life is ornamental and leisured. He does things suavely and without hurry. His surroundings suit him

admirably, and when he takes tea in the garden, dressed in spotless riding-togs, he is every inch the picture he thinks he is.

My somewhat covert admiration of his sartorial perfection has been a bit marred, however, by a suspicion that his life was not one of full-flavored and perfect rusticity. It seemed too perfect in detail, just a bit studied. A tumble-down stone wall separates my entire estate from one corner of his domain. It is not a well-preserved or suburban looking wall. I know it is my duty to repair it. I mean to sometime. Over this wall on rare occasions we hold conversation, and it was while thus engaged that I unwittingly discovered his secret. I had said something about pigs and, not wishing to appear superior or improperly proud of my worldly possessions, I inquired as to how his pigs "did" — pigs are one of the few animals who "do." To my surprise, he told me that he did not keep pigs, not even a pig; in fact, he would not tolerate one on his place. Then I knew his secret, I realized the flaw in his pretentious rusticity.

## BLESSED BE THE PIG

I turned and walked sadly away. There are times when people reveal themselves so shamelessly and in such bland innocence of the awful revelations they make that the kindest thing you can do is to leave them in ignorance of their guilt.

Then a disquieting thought came to me: if Midas dislikes pigs so much, perhaps he dislikes mine, and wishes them removed. Perhaps he meant to go on and make the suggestion. It was well that I left him. I hastened my step lest he call me back.

Presently I found myself in earnest contemplation of the creatures held in so low esteem by my neighbor. I looked tenderly at them. I recognized the mood: it was the familiar one that is experienced when you hold in your hand a most unflattering report from your eldest's preceptor, and the tiny culprit stands before you waiting the utterance of reprimand or sentence. This mood, by some strange twist in my mind, always prompts immoderate and boisterous laughter, which must be restrained in the family circle; but to-day I was safely out of

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hearing. My neighbor was taking tea by now in an ornate and inaccessible garden, and I found myself shaken with Homeric laughter as I leaned over the low wall and shared my merriment with two most astonished pigs.

Of course Midas would not keep a pig! I might have known it. Midas chops trees in a silk shirt. That in itself is not inherently base or sordid, but he grunts (it is not a pretty word, but he does) when his axe strikes the tree or log he is man-handling in an utterly inaccurate imitation of a real chopper with a real axe striking real blows. He fails to synchronize properly and betrays the amateur. I have even heard him describe a pack of hounds as "dogs"! I was not thinking pleasant thoughts of Midas. I did not try to; I knew I was through with him. Our wives might continue to exchange bien-nial calls, we might even exchange a word or two over the wall, but for all intents and purposes I knew I was through with Midas. How silly I had been — of course Midas would not keep a pig.

## BLESSED BE THE PIG

And what a pity! By one of those wise provisions of a benign Providence this crowning glory of rusticity is within the reach of the humblest, except those unfortunates who dwell in congested districts where a perverse public opinion has legislated against this highly useful animal. But then, no self-respecting person would live in such a place anyway.

There is no need to enlarge upon the economic value of the pig. The billboards and the press are radiant with tasteful illustrations of the appetizing final state of this succulent animal. It is in other ways and for other reasons that I admire and love him.

He is the one animal with which man can ever hope to be on intimate terms, who is an incorrigible wag. He is the humorist of the farm. It seems strange that it should be so. Bred for countless generations for nothing but culinary purposes, daily approaching an inevitably tragic end, he has preserved inviolate the comic tradition. When opportunity presents, my friend, look attentively at those little, glittering eyes and you will see a

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waggish twinkle that will convince you that you are in the presence of a humorist.

To get the very best out of your ownership of a pig, thought should be given to his habitat. An enclosure is necessary. Now then; have the enclosure of such a height that your elbows rest comfortably upon the top, arrange a soft and agreeable footing on the windward side of the enclosure, and all will be well. Your relation with a pig is not an intimate one; he is not to be handled except in early infancy; and you will find that merely to contemplate him, as you stand in a comfortable and relaxed attitude with some support to the body, will yield a rich reward.

They should be secured young. There is in a very young pig an innocent joyousness that will amuse you in the early stages of your acquaintance and will give you food for thought as your intimacy grows. And then the pleasure of seeing them grow! If you have a low and commercial type of mind you can calculate daily your profit, even after deducting the interest on your modest initial investment. The upkeep is

## BLESSED BE THE PIG

not a heavy item. One of the most charming things about a pig is his heartfelt gratitude for the delicacies which a wasteful and ignorant generation regard as inappropriate for human consumption; and to beneficent use he puts them, returning literally an hundredfold.

But it is not these sordid considerations that lead me to love a pig. It is the intellectual sympathy existing between us that endears him to me.

In the first place; a pig, more than any of your other animal friends, looks like many people you know. The moment you see a new pig you have at once a dozen names in mind, every one of them fitting perfectly. I will admit that I have encountered a curious prejudice on the part of some people against having a pig named after them. This can be remedied in a simple and most effective manner. In my case, I have a pig that irresistibly reminded me of a near relative, a man of pronounced opinions. That settled his name. On formal occasions and for reference in certain quarters I use a

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coldly classic name with no special significance; but at the twilight hour, when that pig and I hold communion, I address him by his lawful given name.

I have had pigs who possessed a variety of aliases. In such a case, as I talk pleasantly with one or the other, I go through the list until I use the one name I know to be his by every right of pigship. An ear pricks up, a roguish eye twinkles a bit more brightly, and after a delicately executed *pas seul* around the enclosure, he is back once more, demure and attentive.

And how attentive he is! He stands with ears erect, fore feet firmly planted in the empty trough, his little eyes raised to mine, and his nostrils twitching with interest and anticipation. In that posture he is the living image of a lady I know, as she leans over her teacup to catch the last syllable of innuendo in the last titbit of scandal that is making its rapid circuit of our little town. So I address my remarks to Mrs. Jones, and relate to her incidents in the lives of mutual friends no less apocryphal than those so much enjoyed

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by my neighbors. And Mrs. Jones' eyes twinkle, and her nose twitches, and her tail curls tighter and tighter in sheer delight, until I burst into laughter with a guilty fear that I may have been overheard — may have so set in motion a new series of stories that would inevitably bring disaster to some of our most respected townsfolk.

There is a direct simplicity about a pig. He knows no affectations. He has but two ends in view: one is to wax fat, — and how splendidly he does it, — the other, to amuse with a subtle, ironic humor. He lives a curiously circumscribed life in utter and absolute contentment. He has none of that nervous intellectual intensity that is so wearing to live with. He has no illusions; he indulges in no moods or fancies; but what a wonderful companion he is — the very flower of discretion! Your most intimate confidences are safe with him.

The older he grows, the more closely in his stately prime does he resemble the president of our local bank until, at times of financial stringency, I can hardly bring my-

## BUCOLIC BEATITUDES

self to visit him. I know if he could speak he would say something about an impending overdraft. He knows it too, and as he waddles over toward me he puffs and grunts a bit in covert imitation of the great man whom he knows I fear. I am quick to act on his suggestion. It suits my mood. There are plans afoot which will soon necessitate a visit to that temple of finance. It will be well to be letter-perfect in my part, though I know from experience that my part in the dialogue will be unimportant, once it gets under way.

The visit starts with an effusive welcome, as Moneybags extends a moist and yielding hand. A wan smile flits for a moment across his impassive countenance, and the judicial manner is once more assumed. How are things with me? Well, he hopes. But at times like these it is difficult to tell — very difficult. A faint note of pessimism already begins to creep into the monologue. General business conditions are unsatisfactory; there has been overproduction in certain industrial lines; the situation in the Near

## BLESSED BE THE PIG

East is not what he would like to have it. Dark hints of revolution and tottering governments, of an uncomfortable feeling in Wall Street, lead naturally to a detailed description of the appalling condition of the farmer (here I begin to be sympathetic), due to the presence of either too much or too little gold in the country, and I am newly impressed by the unfortunate circumstance that I either am or am not a citizen of a debtor nation. I do not quite know which it is, but it is dreadful, whatever it is, and I find myself suddenly filled with compunction that I should have come to this noble, suffering person with my paltry needs. I begin to see dimly that I am only adding a feather's weight to the staggering load that this self-forgetful Atlas is already carrying, as single-handed he supports the financial fabric of the world.

Moneybags pauses, a chubby hand plays nervously with a delicate ivory paper-cutter. He glances apprehensively at the door; his voice becomes a husky whisper as he alludes to general conditions of unrest

among the working classes, their utter lack of appreciation of what is being done for them, and the certainty that things will be worse before they are better. Long ago my little errand has been forgotten in a flood of sympathy for a man so harried by world problems.

At this point Moneybags observes a delicate morsel in a far corner of the trough and he moves away to investigate. It proves attractive, and he forgets me in his efforts to secure it. It is well, for at that moment we are joined by the companion of his sequestered life. It is Mrs. Murphy, the excellent woman who does the cleaning and other important matters in the little house yonder.

She comes abruptly; her manner has none of the poise and dignity which have always endeared her companion to me. She is vocal, she is positive, she knows what she wants and goes after it with commendable directness. I fear she is, like myself, hopelessly middle-class. But I like her. It is a relief to converse again with a pig who talks my language and with whom I have much in

## BLESSED BE THE PIG

common. For Mrs. Murphy and I have many mutual interests — taxes, interest, mortgages, plumbers' bills, insurance premiums, indigent relatives, and growing children.

The talk turns to other channels. Things are not well with Mrs. Murphy; her rent has been raised on account of conditions in the Near East, there has been illness, food is very dear. I try to explain to her that this is due entirely to unsettled conditions in Russia, but without great success.

Her sister's children — oh yes, they are with her. Yes, six of them. The two eldest are in an "institooshun." Thomas will soon be at work, she hopes. Her lord and master is just at present unemployed, but as soon as he comes out of the hospital he hopes to get half-time.

Mrs. Murphy glides easily from the concrete to the abstract. It is the rich who are to blame. They are growing richer, and the poor poorer. She looks scornfully at the towers of the palace beyond the stone wall. I hasten to tell her that we are not on terms

now, that I too am out of sympathy with Midas. She seems appeased.

I try to remember all the dreadful things Moneybags told me. It is no use. Moneybags was right. The working classes do not, will not understand; but I have a suspicion that Mrs. Murphy and I do not quite understand Midas and Moneybags.

A joyous bark is heard. Shrill voices pierce the air. School is over and life really begins. I leave this oddly assorted pair to work out their problems, grateful for an hour of perfect peace in the presence of perfect understanding.

Finally, a pig is the only animal friend with whom I am able to part at an appropriate time without bitter grief and self-reproaches. It is not that I am not sincerely attached to him by the subtlest ties of kinship, but there seems to be only one logical finale of our life together. If the parting is delayed too long, the relationship loses something of its old-time zest, the flower is fading, and dull and apathetic habit re-

## BLESSED BE THE PIG

places the first sweet fervor of fellowship. It is well to let the parting come in proper season without vain regrets. And even after the parting there is opportunity for affectionate remembrance. Your breakfast takes on a new and interesting significance. As the delicate morsel rests before you, you inhale its subtle aroma, you see the slender stripes of delicate color, and you wonder — you wonder —

The pig has a secure niche in the Temple of Letters. The gentle Elia has enshrined him for all time. But by a curious chance even Elia emphasized the gastronomic aspect of his fame without reference to his waggish quality. It is well that the benign Dr. Dolittle has placed before us his true picture in Gub-Gub, beloved of children.

And now, my friend, the fever of the day is over. The twilight hour has come with its suggestion of peace and contemplation. Come with me and we will rest awhile. Let me introduce you to a friend of mine, a person of importance in local financial and social circles. He will amuse you.

## BUCOLIC BEATITUDES

And when you reach that time in your life when you begin to suffer from the chronic irritability of the man over fifty, when you begin to get a bit queer, and quarrel with your neighbor simply because he wears expensive and becoming raiment, when you need a solace and an unfailing source of understanding fellowship, when you begin to feel the need of occasional soul-communings with Nature's subtlest humorist and most perfect clown, apply to me; I will sell you a pig. And, having dined at your table, I know he will "do" well.



BLESSED BE THE HEN





## BLESSED BE THE HEN

THERE dawns a day when the big rock to the south of the stable looms black against the shrinking snowdrifts. A crumbling Gibraltar stands beneath the apple trees, its turrets wasted by the sun, its massive walls fast melting to decay. Gone is its grandeur; gone are its brave defenders; no sign of them remains save one scarlet gauntlet, lost in repelling the last desperate sally of a departed foe, now the sodden and solitary reminder of an epic winter.

A strange new life is stirring within the little house. Steps are quicker, voices gayer; new tasks come with every hour. A joyous restlessness sets life a-tingle; windows open,

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and mops are shaken. Curious caps appear over familiar female faces. All is bustle, eagerness, and mirth.

Outside, great rich black spots of earth appear. The first green things look out from garden tangles, and the sun pours its prodigal warmth into every dark and frozen corner.

There dawns a day set by no calendar, decreed by no lawgiver, when the mystic ritual of spring must be observed. Long since have fireside tasks and recreations been a mockery. Long since a strange and willful discontent has set us all on edge. For many days the leaping blood in little bodies had been ringing out its imperious command; and yet it was not time. Then at last we know the time has come.

With perfect understanding we set forth. Down through the land new-ploughed last fall, by the willows with their magic mist of spring, through the pine woods where snow-banks still lie purple in the hollows about the giant trunks, on to the river bank.

There it lies before us at full flood, lazily rafting its harvest of broken ice to the sea

## BLESSED BE THE HEN

not far away. Where the sun lies warm the bank is open, and the black water curls at our feet with little intimate chuckles of delight.

We follow the well-known path. No words are needed, no shouted directions or commands, until in a bend of the stream we reach our goal. Sharp knives whip out. The tender branches are bent gently down, and with a clear, firm cut the sprays fall at our feet. Not many — just enough to place with reverent hands in a certain place in a certain room. Our little store is divided into three exactly equal parts, and each bearing his share, we turn toward home. Now tongues are loosed and once more the litany of spring is chanted. Home in the half light of the afternoon, back to lights and warmth, but it is not the same. We feel a presence. The dark, outside, is friendly; the warm wind no longer sobs in the chimney top; the lights lie soft on the sleek gray tufts of the willow branches in the big green vase. ✓

We all know what the morrow will bring forth, but we do not like to talk about it.

## BUCOLIC BEATITUDES

We hint at something of rare significance, but our talk just skirts the edges of direct allusion. It must be done as always done before: no variation, no vulgar interpolations or changes, no deviation from accepted and time-honored tradition. All is in readiness and all will be well.

The morning dawns. There is no haste, all is decency and order. But when the sun is warm, once more with high intent we seek the open. Down the little avenue, past the pear trees to the stable, past the paddock, through a tiny gate to a low, long building near a shabby wall.

The doors are closed, the windows screened with cotton cloth. We pause to listen and hear busy scratching and muffled talk. Down the long yard, enclosed by wire netting, to the gate — a bit awry and uncertain on its hinges, but bravely has it withstood the wintry winds. We fumble at the wooden button that holds it fast. The gate opens and we stand aside.

A moment's tense silence while the world waits. Then the Duke of Wellington ap-

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pears, resplendent in his spring apparel. With shrewd, inquiring eyes he cocks his head, and his great red wattles shake with eagerness. A step nearer, and then he speaks. A brief word of command, and out from crowded winter quarters come the ladies of his household. With the Field Marshal in the van they reach the gate. Another moment of inquiry and then, with feet high lifted and yellow toes curled close, they take the first step of the year in the great outdoors. We count them as they pass. We exchange knowing glances. All present or accounted for, save one. We know which one, and so we wait. It is but a moment when, with shrill cries of alarm and many aimless tackings, the delinquent appears. Yes, it's Mrs. Cuttle, always anxious, always late, always perturbed and scolding violently. True to form she begins the season. Mrs. Cuttle has long since outlived her productive years, but she is retained as a moral lesson, and it is not lost: to "cuttle" is a cardinal sin. May her anxious, vociferous life be spared for years to come,

sobeit she will only continue to impress on all the vacuity of "cuttling."

The Field Marshal now has his forces deployed as skirmishers, and like the prudent commander that he is, takes his place well in the rear, where with all-pervading eye he watches the rank and file. They are locating and examining each bit of bare ground, Mrs. Cuttle keeping her place in line with great difficulty and greater uncertainty. We listen for the food song. There are those who pretend that a hen possesses no vocabulary. Dull the ears that cannot hear her endless variations of a simple theme. The food song, a long succession of monosyllabic interrogatives, is one of her most endearing performances. Now it comes to us, and we know the quest is rewarded. We gather closer and watch the Field Marshal. The moment will be here soon. Will the ceremony be complete? Will it close with the usual crashing crescendo that we love?

He steps proudly along; he pauses, looks about, the sun gleaming on the noble iris

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of his neck. He steps to an upturned clod of earth and balances delicately on it. Slowly his wings begin to move. He is erect, noble, effulgent. His wings flap wildly, he throws back his head, and with comb and wattles blazing in apoplectic ecstasy, he sounds the clarion call. It rings in our ears, it tingles in our blood. It is more than the fitting climax of a perfect drama; it is the call to action. Tasks await us, enthralling undertakings, and we must not delay. But delay we do, for a moment to feel the glowing warmth of the heightening sun, to let the sweet southwest wind blow in our faces, to smell the cool, wet odor of the awakening soil.

We listen in the stillness for a voice. Eager eyes turn toward the willows, parted lips and straining ears wait for the message, and it comes. The little brook beyond the willows now is free and he is talking to us!

But now to work. First the tools must be collected from strange hiding-places, boards and nails, pails and brushes, all the jovial paraphernalia of building and repairing.

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The deserted henhouse is cleaned in every corner: nests and roosts, floor and ceiling. What glorious dust, what proud disdain of clothes and hands, what prodigies of skill and strength mark the full sweep of our enterprise! New litter on the floor, new hay in the nests, windows washed, and screens removed. By night the returning wanderers find all in order.

But this has been only one day; we know more glorious ones will follow. As the days go by we work more slowly, for we must not spend these golden hours too freely.

Then all is ready. There must be a dry, warm day with just a breath of wind. Pails are brought and we mix the magic brew: pure white lime, bubbling and steaming. The cauldrons simmer; we stir and mumble strange enchantments, old magic words of bygone ages; we croon strange songs, and stir, and stir. It is finished — whiter than anything imagined, smooth as velvet; there is nothing like it.

Inside we go. We put it on in lavish manner. It drops; it spots; it spatters; and it will

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burn if you are unwary. We emerge exultant. For once we have had enough of something, and how we have reveled in it! A general appraisal of our clothes is made, and bad as they are, we are sure they are not so bad as they were last year.

Happy in the completion of this undertaking, we rest awhile. For days we glory in the matchless product of our skill, but we know this leisure must not last. That is the great fact at the bottom of man's devotion to the hen. She is an insistent creature and goads you on to activity. She demands an industry equal to her own. There are only brief, infrequent periods of contemplative pleasure in your association with a hen. No hours of easy talk, no placid silences, no moments of tender abstraction. A hen does not sentimentalize, she acts, and she insists that your relationship be that of a working partner; but how richly she rewards the conscientious performance of your duty to her!

Already there are signs in the Field Marshal's household that new duties will soon

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confront us. Some of the ladies are becoming querulous. With ruffled feathers, they scold the hours away. They even lose their appetites and refuse to go outdoors. They are watched, and many consultations held. Some evening the great news comes. Already a place has been prepared, and so at dusk with lighted lantern three conspirators creep abroad. Thirteen chosen eggs are borne to a secluded retreat, and there we find her, spread to an incredible breadth, with head drawn in, beady eyes snapping, and a vicious beak ready to strike if you make an unguarded motion. The lantern is held aloft and one by one the eggs are laid before her. With gentle pressure she takes them and stows them away in the recesses of the feathers. Food and water are placed near, and we tiptoe away, awed by this mystery of life. .

Tiny new abodes must be prepared, and long hours are spent sitting in the sun, mending, painting, renewing homes for the expected offspring. What hours they are! The talk is good: it ranges through the

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heights and depths of life, its magic and its mystery. Serious discussion of practical details of construction follows close on the heels of myth and fable. So the twenty-one days pass. The last are feverish. It is hard not to interfere, we feel that we could do so much to help, but bitter experience has taught us that the stupidest hen, even Mrs. Cuttle, knows more about the matter in hand than we do. We are humbled.

On the twenty-first day at twilight we again seek her out. There she is, immovable, spread deeper and wider than ever. Worn with her long vigil, pale and wan, she resolutely waits. Presently there is the faintest shadow of a movement under the protecting feathers. The watchers exchange excited whispers; then slowly, one after the other, we lean down and listen close to the maternal breast. A feeble sound is heard, and eyes are wide with wonder.

Then follow days of unremitting toil, not unmixed with anxiety and cruel disappointments. Tragedies come which spoil a day for us, but it is part of the game, part

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of the great game we are trying to learn to play with poise and patience.

I sit on the paddock fence and smoke my pipe. I watch the sun sink low behind the woodland to the west. Up from the ploughed land comes the Field Marshal with his host. When I first see him he has them in extended order; as he comes to more difficult terrain, he skillfully manœuvres them into a column of fours and passes me in perfect array. I drop to my feet and come to a rigid salute. He passes the reviewing stand with glittering eye and haughty step. I notice that on the return into familiar country he is at the head of the column. And what a picture he makes! Here is a bird, methinks, who never has had and never will have an "inferiority complex." And, after all, he is acting his little part well. What more can man or bird do? Play your part in the drama — and what a drama it is!

Lights glimmer in the little house. I must go. I thrust my pipe deep into my pocket without knocking the heel out —

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a habit I practise, but deplore; it has grown on me of late years. I walk toward the house. At the lilacs by the hedge I stop.

The soft air is full of myriads of little voices; small rustling things disturb the grass; the soft sod yields beneath my step, and pungent odors float down the wind. Life, imperious life is singing in the night its message of growth. Grow and multiply, grow, grow for to-morrow the harvest. And the very stars in the heavens swing low to listen.

A shrill cry of distress reaches my dreaming ears. I start, but I know from whence it comes. It is Mrs. Cuttle, late as usual, blundering homeward in the dark.





BLESSED BE THE COW





## BLESSED BE THE COW

I LAY at full length on a shaded piazza and pretended to read my excellent farm paper. The midsummer heat made this form of agriculture the only agreeable one.

"What," asked my eldest, "is a bovine ruminant in three letters?"

"A bovine ruminant," I responded, "is what the editor of this journal calls a cow. The young gentlemen who edit a certain literary weekly with which I was once familiar would call a cow a bovine ruminant. That is why I no longer take in the literary weekly and continue to read the farm journal."

"Thanks," she said, "It fits nicely."

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"You are fortunate to find anything that fits in this crazy world," I answered, and leaped to my feet.

I was in bad humor. Things were at sixes and sevens, and besides, I had lost my pipe. This was not an unusual event, in fact, it is lost about half the time. But for this happy circumstance I know I should smoke too much.

I have an efficient friend, whose wife keeps her kitchen spoons arranged on revolving wooden cones, who suggested once that a simple solution of my difficulty would be to have two pipes. That is exactly what an efficient man would suggest, never stopping to consider the inconvenience of having to hunt for two lost pipes. One is bad enough.

I slouched into the garden and sat down on a bench. It had been exposed to the sun for some hours and was hot. I succeeded, however, in locating my pipe in an entirely improper and unorthodox pocket. I was rather sorry I found it, for my tobacco was moist and would not burn properly.

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It soon became obvious that I could not remain where I was. I rose and started on an aimless round of my small estate. Never had it looked worse; never was there plainer evidence of a hundred sins of omission and commission. I bit my pipestem savagely as I passed the lilacs. Cerberus lay in a cool hollow in the shade. He glanced up at me and decided to remain where he was. That hurt me, but I would not call him, and I went on alone. The paddock was empty. That was good — no place for a horse in the boiling sun. I looked into the stable. Everything was wrong, too many stall windows closed; but I won't open them. On through the gate — open, of course, in the face of definite orders to keep it closed. I won't close it, but I will see about that later. I looked into the hen-house; nothing but drooping birds in utter dejection, save Mrs. Cuttle, who was rolling in drunken ecstasy in a dust hole in the yard.

I decided it was cooler in the house. Perhaps if I laid some tobacco on a news-

paper in the sun for a time things would be better. I determined to try it.

As I approached I heard voices. There were white-clad figures in the garden — the dresses looked thin and cool. I caught the sound of laughter, gentle and well-bred, and the clink of ice in glass. For one moment I stood irresolute, and then I fled. Down past the strawberries I hurried. I crouched behind the rose trellis, and made the open. I did not want to run, — I might be observed, — so I assumed an air of importance and walked as rapidly as possible over the rough ground. I climbed the stone wall; a loose stone fell and scraped my ankle. I said something and hurried on. A great elm tree shades the corner of this pasture; I sank to the ground in sheer exhaustion beneath its extended branches. Now I was safe.

I took off my coat and tried to put it between my back and the tree. What a lot of nonsense, I thought, is talked about Mother Nature. I never lay on the ground comfortably in my life; something always

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pricks or tickles or crawls, and it is hard. Now a low chair in a shaded garden with a cool drink in a tall glass, that might — but no, I would rather lie here until numb with stiffness than go back now.

Why people you don't care about insist on breaking into the privacy of people they don't care about is a mystery to me. This whole fabric of social life is a tissue of pretense, an empty trading in social coin: a dinner for a dinner, a luncheon for a luncheon, a call for a call, with a sweeping clearance-sale once a year in the form of a crowded miscellaneous affair called a tea.

Those people there in the garden. I do not know who they are, but I can guess. I am well out of it; I am sure I am not interested in the domestic details of their lives, and they are all talking at once about their servants or their children. Unpleasant as my present situation is, I am quite content to stay here until they go and life returns to the pleasant channels of normal privacy.

I tried sitting up straight; I even tried to cross my legs, tailor-fashion — this proved

an anatomical impossibility. I remembered the tobacco, rose, and laid some out on a stone near at hand. As I did so I heard the swish of grass, and the family cow moved placidly into the area of shade. With delicate deliberation she lay down, and we found ourselves face to face. If she was surprised she did not betray it. She looked at me with great liquid eyes as tranquil as a forest pool. I noticed her nose. How flat and big and wet and cool it looked! I decided she was a good-looking cow. I hope she is as good as she looks, for she constitutes the entire herd.

I have a friend, a most engaging person, who combines profound knowledge of a dozen sciences with an encyclopædic erudition in regard to cows. He asked me once if she was a grade cow. I said I did not know, but she had a curious metal tag in one ear. He explained the significance of the tag, and smiled. I like his smile — he has wonderful teeth — poor fellow, he does not smoke enough to ruin them.

There being nothing else to look at, I

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looked at Dolly. She was chewing her cud. The slow rhythmic precision of her technique fascinated me. I particularly admired the sideways movement of the lower jaw. She stopped; a gentle genuflection of the neck was noticeable; and she resumed. I had never had such a chance to observe a cow before and I made the most of it. I felt that I was seeing for the first time the noble dignity of her head, her broad fine brow, and above all the eyes, serene and beautiful.

She was tormented by flies, but she ignored them except for a lazy swish of her tail. A distant train whistled; a car screeched on the highway; she did not move, but chewed serenely on.

I found it growing cooler; the tobacco experiment was a success. I discovered an agreeable hollow in the ground and fitted myself comfortably into it.

I recalled those far-off bitter days when I did not own a cow, when her only substitute was the rattle of bottles in an alley at some grim hour before dawn. What fiendish delight the purveyor of those bottles

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took in banging area gates! I have never known any early-morning milkmen intimately, but I have often wondered what their private lives might be. I suppose they enjoy the rights of citizenship — they may have homes — I wonder.

Then I looked at Dolly's eyes again. I could not resist them. I recalled the age-old story of the maiden changed to a heifer by a jealous god. I noticed for the first time a look of imprisoned sadness in her eyes. There was a gadfly in that story too, I remembered, and it drove her into the sea. Unlike mortals, Dolly has evidently developed an immunity to gadflies.

What wonderful old stories those are! How young the world was, and how it has changed! All but Dolly; she is as she was, grazing on the slopes of Olympus. It is man who has hurried and worried himself from change to change until he can no longer see the beauty of the simple, lovely, unchanged thing.

How cool the breeze, how sweet the odor of the grass! The restless spring has passed.

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The year has grown; and now the full accomplishment of summer meets the eye. The season pauses, and for a few matchless weeks we see no change. Nature rests; her work is well-nigh done, and you are free to see it all if you will only look.

Dolly rose to her feet and turned slowly toward the bars. No need to clang the hour in jangling notes from tawdry towers; Dolly has met the tryst at the meadow gate ever since Pan piped the shepherd's flocks to madness. I rose too, and we went together to the gate. I let down the bars and we stepped through. She stopped to crop a tuft of grass. I slid my arm over her neck, and through the meadow where I fled in haste we walked side by side with measured tread toward the sweet-smelling barn.

The demands of my small estate are modest, but I employ the services of one associate and fellow worker. He must be a man of varied talents and tireless industry and above all, for my entire satisfaction, he must be gifted with a sense of values, a feeling for the fitness of things. This is hard to find.

I hate to make a change, but occasionally it has to be done, and that involves the ordeal of interviewing applicants, a duty I loathe and perform badly. The interview always changes from an inquiry into the applicant's fitness for the place into a lengthy apology on my part for the duties imposed. I have the courage, however, to make my decision hang on his answers to two questions. When last struggling with this problem I was called upon by a brisk young man who impressed me tremendously. He seemed the sort of person who would romp through his day's work by noon and have the rest of the time to devote to the small details never attended to properly with me. I had made up my mind to entrust myself to his masterful direction. I paused before applying the final test; I eyed him narrowly.

"Do you milk?" I asked.

A deprecatory smile flittered across his face; that was all. The question was too absurd to require a verbal answer.

"Do you milk — reverently?" I asked.

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"In my last place," he answered, "we milked by electricity."

I dismissed him. What a preposterous idea! I would as soon cultivate my roses with a caterpillar tractor.

The next applicant was an inefficient-looking elderly man with kind eyes. He had nice wrinkles. I count a great deal on wrinkles.

I asked him the crucial question. For one moment he searched my very soul with twinkling eyes.

"I try to," he said.

And so the Incomparable One came.

As Dolly and I pass the rose trellis behind which I had skulked an hour before, I square my shoulders and walk upright like a man. Here Cerberus joins us. He rubs a cool, moist nose in the palm of my hand and trots quietly beside me.

Two khaki-clad little figures appear from the house, carrying between them a glittering pail. The Incomparable One springs from the earth somewhere, and we all meet on the gravel path before the door.

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The Incomparable One, with a broken riding-crop as his badge and insignia of rank, takes my place and gently directs Dolly's progress. We fall behind and wait outside till Dolly has drunk her fill and is standing in her accustomed place. Once, pail in hand, I had preceded her, but my error had been made plain to me, and I never transgressed again.

Dolly now in place, the Incomparable One returns. With hands and arms glistening from recent soapy ablutions, he takes the pail and holds it to the sun. He examines every inch of it critically and with deliberate care. The process is always observed by an Hibernian lady from a kitchen window with whole-hearted disapproval. This daily episode is the only incident in a busy life in which my perfect servitor is not the very flower of tact and discretion.

His examination complete, we go where Dolly waits. He takes his place on gently tilted stool; we stand one side. He pulls his rolled-back sleeves an inch higher, his great firm hands are rubbed together, and

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then the fingers flex in smooth preparatory exercises. He leans forward and gently touches each teat in turn. From each he pulls a tiny lactic stream and lets it fall upon the clean rye straw beneath his feet. This is not done because — as held by some — the first milk contains more impurities than the rest; it is a libation, a propitiatory offering to whatever god there be who presides over the destinies of cattle and impecunious rural sentimentalists.

And now an upward glance. A little figure, each in daily turn, takes its place, and Dolly's swinging tail is gently held at rest. The pail is raised to its position between extended knees, and all is ready. I notice that the milker adheres to the proper school. I do not hold, myself, for a position with the forehead of the milker pressed against the bovine flank; rather, I like to see the left knee gently touching the off hind leg. It is a satisfaction to see things done with a nice attention to detail.

And now we hear the first streams strike the bottom of the empty pail. The shrill

staccato of their impact is the overture, soon muffled by the increasing flood. The cadence slows; we are in the full orchestral swing by now. The milker's bowed head is slowly raised, and, as the white foam nears the top, he looks aloft. He sways a bit on his tilted stool; his head moves gently back and forth like some inspired conductor carrying his musicians through the difficult passages of a mighty symphony. And now the beat quickens, the little streams leap into the rising tide of foam with soft lispings sounds. A final volley; then a few soft notes, long-drawn, and it is done.

The milker rises, flushed, triumphant. He casts a quick appraising glance at the pail.

"Half quart off to-night — the grass is getting dry," he says.

Our messengers wait, and with the heavy pail between, carry our precious spoil kitchenward. Once, when the going was slippery, an accident occurred. But that is not spoken of now.

I glance about the tidy stable. How well he keeps it! Windows closed against the

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noonday heat now open to cooling breezes of late afternoon. The little gate to the back land, swung hospitably open, invites me to explore its familiar mysteries. I visit the pigs and have a cheerful moment as I note that even here are care and cleanliness. The henhouse, freshly whitewashed, smells of lime, and sleek fat fowl are busy with fresh litter on a dry, clean floor. Cerberus is at my side; my pipe draws cool and sweet.

I remember the garden and the white-clad guests. I shake what dust I may from coat and trousers — I find the guests have lingered. The garden lies half shadowed; sweet flowering things in gay profusion line the soft green turf; a bluebird glides from treetop to tiny pool to drink and bathe.

Gracious ladies sit in gentle talk beneath the trees. I join them. I note with satisfaction that the group contains none save the choice elect. They know the easy give-and-take of talk. They have a feeling for silence, the one true test of gentle breeding. Their clothes, a mystery beyond my ken,

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are those I like — sheer, simple things with graceful lines; their hands, the firm, strong hands of ripened womanhood, with scant adornment. Tiny feet, well shod, are — like their hands — at rest. These four who so adorn the scene are the only ones I know who can sit still.

We talk, each as we choose: the homely task, the book, the play, the careless unthought talk of friends. I feel an utter thankfulness: my lines in very truth have fallen in the pleasantest of places. And well may I be thankful, for many moons may wax and wane before this group, by happy accident, shall meet again in perfect mood and perfect weather. And to think I almost missed it! What brought me back? What happened over yonder, 'neath the tree where Dolly grazed?

The shadows lengthen. One by one, with laughing eyes, the guests betake themselves to homes made blessed by their presence. And now we sit in silence. Back from duties well performed, the children come. Tired little bodies seek the softness of the

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close-cropped grass. Cerberus sees that all is well, and sinks to slumber by my chair.

Peace, perfect peace, comes with the setting sun.

The evening meal is ready. Grudgingly we leave the glamour of the hour. As we cross the grass, a voice says, "I am glad you joined us. It was pleasant."

And as I stop to fondle Cerberus at the door I think I hear — I am not sure — the same voice saying, in a soft aside, "So, blessed be the cow."





BLESSED BE THE HORSE





## BLESSED BE THE HORSE

I LIVE in a hunting-country. Every autumn our stone walls show tiny red banners marking the run, and the talk is much of horse.

I do not hunt, myself: my interest in the sport is purely academic. But of one thing I am sure — from an æsthetic standpoint there is no sport like it.

On occasions the run passes within sight of my abode, and sometimes it begins or ends within a stone's throw of my outdoor bedroom. Those are the rare mornings. No need to watch the clock. You lie secure and warm, half sleeping, half awake, when slowly you hear far off that magic sound of beating hoofs — not the sharp rattle of steel on

harsh macadam, but the low beat of distant hoofs on good firm earth. There is no sound like it. You catch a suggestion of it sometimes when you ride alone, and horse and rider share the glory of a run across some open meadow before you turn for the long, cool walk homeward with loose rein and lowered head. But to hear it in its perfection scores of hoofs must beat in unison, and it must begin far off and come on toward you with growing intensity.

I hear it and sit up. I pull the blankets close. It is frosty. Stray wisps of mist still lie in the hollows. From chaste retirement I can view the whole panorama. The hounds swing round the corner of the woods, tiny specks of brown-and-white in full cry, followed close by splashes of scarlet. On they come, they take each intervening wall smoothly and without effort. The field follows, strung out in orderly observance of the rules and courtesies, whatever they may be, of this regal game. And all the time the music of the hoofs swells about me, teases, tempts, and troubles.

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The pack stops by the elm tree in Dolly's pasture. A grizzled rider yaps his immemorial call, as old as hunting, as ancient as this noble sport itself. He tosses tidbits to the eager pack: their scant reward for miles of breathless coursing, unless the run itself be their reward. The old man has ridden many times like this; he knows the best there is to show. I wonder sometimes how he thinks we do at this old sport in this new country, for he has ridden with the best across the seas. I watched the hounds as they swept in and knew he must be pleased, for close-packed they came, as if they would make good his boast that one horse-blanket could cover them — the final and unfailing test. The field is in. The Master, magnificent in scarlet, sitting a fretful horse with smiling composure, greets them all, a friendly word and kindly smile for stragglers coming in a bit abashed. The steaming horses move in easy circles, while grooms attend the more exalted riders.

They take the highway and in laughing groups go down the road. A boy appears

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and plucks the red pennants from the walls.  
It is done.

I nestle down. Once more my eyes have seen the glory of the field. I am content, and doze once more, and once again I feel unbounded admiration for the men and women who can so disport themselves before they break their fast.

At an appropriate and fitting hour I repair to my own stable. I do this with some hesitation, for on these mornings, when the hunting-world has swung into our orbit, the Incomparable One greets me with a manner somewhat vague and questioning. He is not quite sure of me and not convinced that his own status is just what he would wish it to be. Why I am not afield he does not know; a horrid doubt assails him. On these mornings I tread with circumspection the devious paths of horsy talk.

Even in my little stable there is a strange unrest. Eyes are brighter; ears are up; nervous hoofs are pawing.

I look them all over; first my own (of course, no man may talk of what is "his"

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with any truth), one in a thousand, purchased for a song, as is my wont by stern necessity, rescued from menial labor and now pet and darling of us all, perhaps a bit too much horse for me, but kind and willing, wise and spirited. The other two, black ponies with white stars, as like as sisters save that one has two white feet and one has one. Each owns a little mistress whom she loves, and these two ponies are as like their riders as if all four were sisters — one nervous, one sedate; one eager at the bit and to be handled with a steady hand, the other willing, always in the van, but temperate and steady. Just a word, and she is back in hand. One curb, one snaffle, so it goes. But use them both aright and all is well.

There are two pleasures in this horse-relation, one afield and one here in the stable. To-day it is indoors, for the promise of the morning has failed. Already a gentle rain is falling and the woods are wet. I love to potter about a stable. A clean stable is the nicest-smelling place in the world. Why feminine nostrils object to stable smells

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indoors I never could understand; but that is only one small part of a greater riddle.

The Incomparable One has learned to know my oddities. One of them is an unreasonable passion for soft leather and glittering metal. What lovelier thing can mortal hand touch than leather, smooth and clean, as soft and supple as velvet? The trappings of my steeds are meagre and far from the best. I see that all is safe, no weak spots at buckles and other secret places; but once safe, that is as far as I can go, except that I believe and teach the simple theory that the poorer the tack the greater the care. And the Incomparable One does wonders. The bridles hang against a clean white cloth; the brow-bands in perfect alignment; the curb against the wall; the snaffle broken, lying on the curb; the chain over the snaffle; reins looped high in perfect symmetry. There is a sight to please: the saddles on their racks with irons off, smooth, clean, and soft; no dust, no soap in crevices, betray an artist's hand. The irons hang on cleaning-hooks and wait

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a final polishing. The feed room next, with its supplies. And now aloft to where the sweet hay lies in dusty half-lights. What a place to dream an hour away, and what a play-place for little people, their minds afire with all the mystery and romance of their first young years!

And now it rains in earnest. I find a small green stool; I take it to the door and sit me down. An open stable-door, a windless rain, a dog beside you, and a bedraggled hen or two to scratch outside. This is the perfect place to be. The moist, damp odors all about you, the sound of restless hoofs, the grind of teeth on hay, the dropping water from the eaves fill ears and heart and soul.

What a strange thing it is that a certain type of biped called Man should have chance dominion over all the other creatures! How he has bound them to his service! And of them all no one has suffered as the horse.

He seems more sensitive than the others. No horse has bad habits, save man-taught ones. What a score on some far-off Judg-

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ment Day has the horse to settle with his master, man! And that is why I like to fuss with horses. I like to try to show them that this relationship can be agreeable to us both. I have no feeling for an outlaw horse, but any horse that has not had unfortunate human relationships too long is worth the experiment.

The horse is a habit-making, habit-controlled creature. The trick seems to be, so far as my very meagre experience has shown, to teach good habits. And of all the creatures I know man is in some ways the least fitted to teach them. He is vain, imperious, and often cowardly; that is why a perfect horseman is just a bit more rare than a perfect poet. I have long since given over any ambition to write an epic poem, but I do hope, if life be spared, by patience, humility, and the sternest application to the task, to learn to ride a horse. I doubt my ultimate success, but somehow I feel that if I ever do, in the face of almost insuperable obstacles both physical and mental, it will be a splendid achievement.

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The golden autumn days go by and the first suggestion of real winter comes. We have, however, here and there a day dedicated to the horse.

Such a day dawns. It is the day that with us is devoted, in theory, to the memory of a Genoese sailor, and is made by beneficent legislation a holiday, a day free from the thralldom of office and school! It has been decided that the morning shall be spent in tasks; there shall be an early lunch, and then a ride, timed to bring us back through the woods when the sun is low and streams in level golden shafts between the trees.

I seek the stable. Already preparations are afoot. My garb alone is warrant for the news. I watch the horses cleaned. I never watch a workman without a thrill, if only he be a real craftsman, a man who loves his work. And such a one is he who cleans my horses. I can clean a horse after a fashion, but here is consummate art: free swing of comb and brush following the graceful lines of the creature's body; the softly spoken word to soothe impatience; the low soft

whistling sound that none but the elect can manage; the tap of comb on hoof or floor; the fearless, accustomed handling of a horse. A perfect art, and loved, I know, by horse as well as man. What little skill I have in other things I'd gladly trade if I could clean a horse the way this old man does.

The hours lag, but now we meet for lunch. Plans are discussed, our course laid out. We make the meal a mockery and hurry to the stable. No having horses brought round to the door — not in our simple life are things like that. We seek them out, and make the pleasure greater.

They stand in single file upon the floor, saddled and bridled, waiting our command. Each is covered with a bright plaid cooler; ears are erect, and nervous lips jingle the shining bits.

The Incomparable One is as busily important as if each steed were a prospective Derby winner. We pull off the coolers, each our own. We fold them up and hang them on the rail, and then we drop restraining hitching-ropes and go out single file. No

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mounting on a slippery stable floor; we want good gravel, smoothly packed beneath our feet. And then I watch to see if lessons have been learned: three things to do before you mount. I smile at the Incomparable One, and he smiles too, as little hands seek saddle girths. A gentle tug; they are all right, not loose, not tight. Then the throat-latch: it must rest light and easy. Then the curb, to see if it be smooth. All is reported right, so then we mount. We feel again a moving creature under us; we feel the gentle lift of smooth, straight legs, and we are off.

I take my place with Two Feet on my right. I notice two links are dropped on her curb chain—it is well. One Foot sedately takes her place upon my left; her curb swings loose; no need for a free hand on that side.

We cross the first meadow at a walk. Two Feet capers and frets a bit; she has not learned yet what One Foot knows so well, that we walk this meadow to test the tack, to feel the seat we have, to find the irons, and to learn the mood that horse and rider share

to-day. We turn into the next; and now a word, and heads come up and off we trot. A gentle pace, but still enough to bring the breeze to our faces, and now we hear the hoofs, the soft sound of yielding leather, and the click of steel. I look from right to left. Youth still fretful and impatient on my right, so I suggest a little lighter hand, a soothing word; upon the left, Experience trots with even temper and with steady stride.

Before us lies a smooth, ascending swell. I ask if we are ready, irons back, feet forward. Then a gentle pressure of the heel, a rein drawn lightly, and three creatures leap. Youth takes the lead; a word must bring her back. This is no race or steeplechase. So back she comes, but shakes her head and dashes foam upon her shoulder. Experience travels neck and neck with me, a tranquil eye, but nostrils quiver, and I wonder if she is recalling days when this pace was mere play for her. At the brow of the hill we pull up and loosen rein. Three heads go down a bit; we ease our seats, and I can see the glow

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in cheeks and eyes that must mean joy and health in future years.

And now a long walk to the woods. We talk of hands and knees, of heels, and of our mounts, each feeling that we ride the very best. And so it goes, walk, trot, and canter. Yes, my friend, that's all. I know it all seems tame to you. We hack, I know, but hacking at its best is all we ever hope or want to do. It is enough. It takes us out; it gives us joy to feel that we can do that much, and day by day we hope to do it better.

And now we reach the woods. The sun is right. We go in single file, with Experience ahead to show the way, and Youth comes next, and Age brings up the rear.

I look ahead at those two little figures. They are learning the hard lessons: constant care, constant thought, the hands, the knee, how often do I speak the word! How hard they try, and how fast they learn! I sometimes think it arrogant to teach; they do as well as I, and better too at times. But now no lessons for the woods entrance. Dry

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leaves are on the path and squirrels scold and scurry. We shout back and forth, "Oh, look! See this, and that!" And then a new tremendous enterprise portends; a strange, new path leads — none of us knows where. We take it, and we wind and twist. What glorious fun, what adventure! and we shout with glee when it brings us out in well-known pastures far from home.

We turn across the broad acres of a friendly neighbor; a narrow, shaded lane invites. A stern sign posted at the gate warns all away, but we are of the elect and enter in. We are under the pine trees now; the needles pave the path. Oh, what a footing! Once more we trot, and almost without sound of hoof we whirl along. Youth is calmer now; she works with us; she has learned the pace and keeps her stride unbroken. Experience asks for more bridle; she knows where she is, and wants a freer head on the long upgrade that brings us to my neighbor's house.

He sees us and waves his hand. He sits in a great chair upon his lawn. A perfect horse-

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man, he will never ride again, but it is joy to him to see the children come, for to such as they he must pass the torch of gentle sportsmanship. And now the crowning moment comes. We swing into a great field, again my kindly neighbor's, and questioning eyes are turned to mine.

All right, we will — but careful now! I know the ground, it's smooth, without a hole, and yonder is a tiny jump, put there by kindly thought for children. I show the way, and as I turn to watch the others, Experience follows; her stride is easy, every nerve at rest. She takes the tiny jump as part of her day's work and canters up and stops. Youth now comes, pulling just a bit and nervous in her stride. She takes it well, but jumps a foot too high and does not want to stop when she is over. She will learn; when she has learned she will know that half the work will do it just as well.

And now the end. We whirl. We let them go. For one short moment we thunder side by side. We hear the hoofs; we feel the plunging bodies between our knees; we see

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the foam blown in the wind. The earth glides under us; we seem to fly. How sure the feet, how mighty are the muscles that hurl us forward! And how our hearts beat and how our faces tingle!

Now we turn toward home. Cool horses out, cool horses in, is our rule. We walk side by side and talk of our adventures. We tell where we were right and where we blundered; how wonderful the horses were; of the beautiful things we saw; of our friends who let us ride over their good land; how to do this and when to do that; all the wonderful minutiae of the greatest sport in the world. We turn down our little avenue; we come home formally and in order.

The Incomparable One is waiting. We dismount, and he takes my horse, out of deference to age and general incapacity. My comrades take charge of their own. We have learned it all — how saddles come off and what you do with them; how bridles come off and where to put them; what to do with the horses and why. What a world of fun it is! The sugar is brought, and glis-

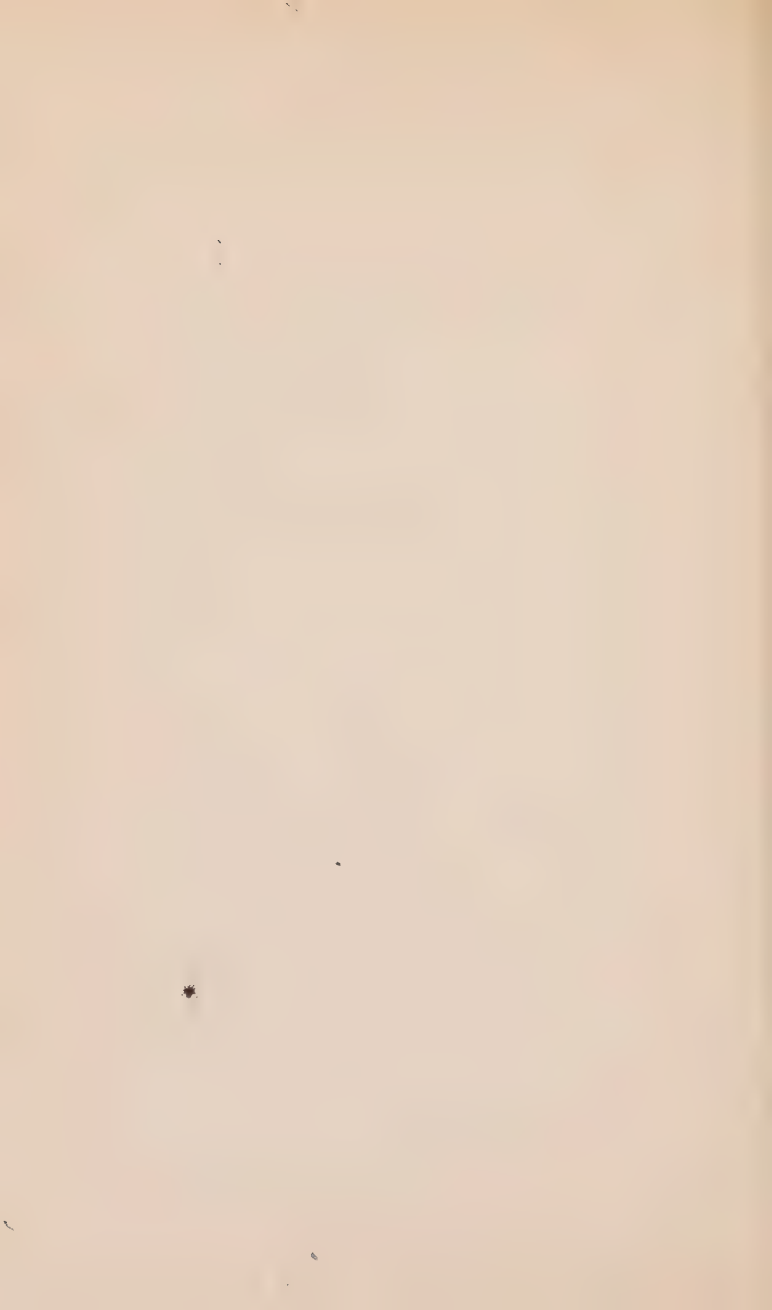
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tening necks arch and gentle lips fondle the sweet offering lying in the flat palms of little hands. And then to the house, to talk it all over again with the world's most attentive listener.

When bedtime comes, I see a light in the stable and go down to find the Incomparable One in the tiny saddle-room.

Somehow that last gallop has made me feel a bit more his peer. So the talk is once more easy, and for an hour it runs. Shrewd, kindly, brave the old man is, and somehow I feel that his body has been kept young and strong, his soul serene and sweet, by his simple, whole-hearted love of horse.





BLESSED BE THE GARDEN





## BLESSED BE THE GARDEN

I HAD as soon read fairy stories to my children in the Congressional Library as to walk in some of the gardens I have seen. For me a garden should be part of one's abode simply another room to step into when the mood requires, a place for early morning investigation and for evening solitude. And such a garden is mine. Why gardens should be made solely a place of exhibition, why they should be tortured into tedious formality and used only on social occasions, is a mystery to me.

Like a good many other things, the use made of gardens by their owners depends a great deal on the owner's attitude toward gardens in general.

I am familiar with two; one the grand manner, which dismisses all details to underlings and which accepts the garden simply as a useful decorative accessory of a highly ornamental life. This manner, for the most obvious of reasons, is not mine. Nor do I accept the over-intimate and prying fussiness of some garden owners: those good people who tell you they know every plant and every flower, who dilate on the doubtful pleasure of doing all the work themselves, who brazenly acclaim the fact that the garden has no secrets from them.

I feel like saying to them: "Dear sir, or madam, what is — what can be your idea of a garden? Is it a laboratory? Is it a workshop? Is it a public house? Do you not know that a becoming reticence is Nature's greatest charm? She does not want you prying about with your little shovel; she knows what she is doing. Your relation with your garden is quite different from that with your iceman. It is wise to know as much as you can about your iceman, but do leave your garden in peace. Beside, you

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are in a fair way to lose all that is best in having a garden, if you have not done so already."

I feel toward a garden a good deal as I do toward a beautiful woman: I do not want to know how she gets her effects.

My feeling about garden work is quite different from my feeling about any other work I do on my small place. I love to slave in a stable or henhouse, for there must be no secrets in either, but I find that great discretion must be used in my work in my garden.

It is only fair to say that, anatomically, I am singularly unfitted for much of the work required. It is a long way to the ground, and to work doubled over, with my head between my knees, I find both tedious and unprofitable. But quite apart from this there are many cogent reasons for my dislike of this kind of work. I know people who delight in visiting a hotel kitchen, that they may see their feast in preparation. I regard this as little short of sacrilege. A perfect meal is a work of art,

and why they should want to witness the sordid details of its preparation is a wonder to me. So it is, or should be, with a garden. The perfect product should be accepted in its perfection, without too much inquiry into or participation in its early stages.

So I delegate as much of this work as I can to hands more competent than mine, contenting myself with tentative suggestion and occasional oversight. The man-made and man-arranged part of a garden interests me but little; it is when Nature takes command, and, left to herself, begins to work her miracles that the beauty and the mystery of the garden call me to wonder and to worship.

Certain chosen tasks are my delight. An entirely unsystematic and listless weeding is one of them, though I confess that the uprooting of any growing thing always brings a pang of doubt to my mind. Often have I nurtured some alien plant and allowed it to flourish because I could not bring myself to tear it up, and passed anxious days lest it be discovered by those in authority.

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I like to take under my charge those plants that do not flourish, for I know it is man's stupidity that makes them backward — some defect in their environment or arrangement. I try to solve the riddle, and sometimes I succeed. Some corner, some spot ill favored by sun or soil, fails to provide a living for anything put there; what delight to learn the secret, correct the error, and produce strong growth and hardy blossoms!

But my chief delight is to sally forth with shears, twine, and a sheaf of slender green sticks, and search out friends in need of succor.

To such as these I explain my errand. Even in my little garden, so "informal" as to be almost slovenly, I know that many cruelties are done: plants of varying and hostile habit thrown together, all living, like myself, under unnatural and often abhorred conditions, trying with all the strength that is in them to escape, to assert themselves, to be as Nature meant them to be. These I try to restrain gently and to correct their wayward tendencies. Often I find some

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plant that for countless generations has known but one habit of growth. Suddenly confronted by abnormal conditions and unfamiliar restraints, it throws tradition to the winds and develops new and strange habits, changes its appearance, and becomes a wanton thing. Such as these I try to restore — with many misgivings — to a more conventional manner of life.

There are those who, like children, are outgrowing their strength, and so I place the needed support and gently tie them to it, explaining, as to children, that it is but for a time, that the bonds are soft, and that as soon as the fibre toughens in their little minds and bodies it will be removed.

Then the cutting and pruning — there is sheer delight. Is it a spark of some old savage forbear that has given man his desire to kill, or is it merely man's inherent vanity? I stand before the tiny bush, with flashing steel in hand. The cave man growls; his fingers itch to cut, to slash, to sever. The coxcomb struts and simpers; he wants the plant to bow before him or be slain; he

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wishes it to feel that only by the grace of this most graceless creature may it live. I know not which it be, perhaps a bit of both. Cut I do, but always with restraint, without the cruel pleasure of the brute; and in humility I strive to check my vanity of being by some mystery lord of this domain.

And when the heat of summer comes, when cruel thirst is drying leaf and bud, there comes a twilight hour when hose is brought and tiny pots are filled and full libations poured. Then later in the darkness you may walk and smell once more the odor of damp earth, and you can really hear the little thankful noises of the plants.

These are some of the pleasures that I know, but over all, supreme and final, is the kinship that you feel for every growing thing. To have this in the full, again I say: be wary of too intimate a view. You do not pry into the secrets of your friends; you do not care to know the hidden things that make them what they are. If you are wise you let your children have some little chambers in their minds close-locked against

intrusion, where the strange alchemy of life works out its mysteries.

So with my garden. There are many dark and shady little places where I do not pry, for here the sacred things are hid that I shall know in their fruition. If with a vulgar curiosity I poke about, expose them to the sun, and break the spell, I frustrate all the plans so quietly afoot. I watch it all and make my guess. I peep a little here and there, and smile when small reward results. I am quick to act when danger comes, but slow to bother when life runs in even tenor, and I try to coax my little garden to confide.

And when it once begins to tell its secrets to me, then no swain who wins at last his loved one's confidence is more elate.

The early morning is the best. Not too early. I do not hold with those who, with the lark, attempt to catch a garden unawares. In decency, I mean, when all is ready, when the sweet languor of the night is past, but long before the business of the day has come — that is the time. When

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silver dewy webs are on the grass, when flower cups adroop are full, and leaves are damp. If you look close you'll see a thousand secret things, exposed at night, not yet secluded from the sun. This and the evening hour are those of confidence.

All day the business of the little world goes on: the task of growth, of flowering and seed, the scented traffic of the toiling bee, the visits of the birds, the errands of the breeze, make for a busy time with little chance for secret enterprise. No man-made factory can compare with this in perfect unison, in calm control and harmony in work. I wish that every mortal who controls his fellows in their toil might have a garden to consult in time of strife, for if he did the strife would never be.

My right to have a garden is often tacitly questioned by those whose garden technique differs from mine. They may be right; I hold no brief for my unlettered manner. I am not wise; I do not know a thousand useful things; I try in vain to store my mind with countless facts that

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would enable me to hold my place in learned talk with experts at the game. But it is vain; I fail, as I have always failed, to know the niceties of any craft. I read and marvel that a mortal mind can compass all I find in garden books. I love to read them, for I feel a little sense of fellowship with those whose lore I envy, and I know they add new members to a goodly fellowship; but to claim I understand it all is vanity. The names alone! The strange and awful appellations which they give my homely friends! With what accustomed grace they handle them! I marvel at their erudition, and despair.

My own nomenclature is strange and weird. It serves my purpose, for I never try to talk of plants except between ourselves, and kindly members of my family condone my strange stupidity. Colors aid, and so does height of growth. What more convenient method could you ask? The tall white thing, the low one also white, the tall pink thing, its lower mate beyond — what could be better? And when we barter for

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new seeds or plants I leave all that to those who know the names which nurserymen and seedsmen use to dignify their wares. Then, too, the habit of the things assists: the happy and the sulky ones, the proud, the modest, timid, or abashed. How plainly every one will give you clue to name it by. Of course, a few good names remain all twisted up with childhood's memories of other gardens, other kindly folk, who taught them to us when we first became aware that gardens are, alone, the places on this earth most worth the space they occupy.

A garden must have privacy — a wall, a hedge, something to keep the world away, for here the choicest hours will be spent. It must have shade, for here will come repose for mind and body more serene than can be found elsewhere. It should be small or have a part reserved for fellowship with growing things. There must be seats, not horrid wooden things upon which no one in his normal mind would sit. For pure effect against a wall of green they satisfy, but as a place to rest, a mockery and sham.

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Give me low seats with ample room for elbows and for legs, so low your hand may touch the grass, that matches may be thrust into the ground and not thrown heedlessly about. These are the only trappings that you need, save pool or basin for the birds to bathe.

Of course, man starts no enterprise, no undertaking for his betterment, without attack from myriads of foes. Just why this should be so, I do not know. Perhaps his ignorance is cause; perhaps he counts as foes a thousand things that help him though he know it not. But certainly it seems ordained that garden joys should pay the highest toll in watchfulness and toil. Why cannot things be beautiful without a battle for the right to live? Perhaps it is that pleasures lightly won are lightly held. If this be so, then any garden which has won its way should give its owner deepest gratitude.

For every year new pestilence arrives, new swarms of insects bringing blight and death must be combated. Why should this

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be? Has not man suffered now enough to recompense that incident of long ago in the first garden that the new world knew? Why may we not contrive to make a place secure from harm, safe from some flying menace to all growth? Is it all wrong that we should thus attempt to fashion something sweet and pure and good? Or do we fly into the face of laws unknown to us, which, after all, are wise, if we but knew?

I do not know; but while the breath of life is in me, while eye can see and hand can serve my will, I 'll fight these creatures with relentless fury, that I may have a tiny spot, one little haven, one small safe retreat where beauty, peace, and quiet may be found.

My enmity does not extend beyond the insect brood. I feel quite differently about the impertinences of my little fur-bearing marauders. There wits are matched and cunning is displayed. The sluggish woodchuck is a friend of mine, and rabbits have a quaint bucolic flavor. A flash of cottontail

amid the pea-brush is a pretty sight. Well may I feel a tolerance for rabbits, for they comprise one of the busiest departments of our establishment. These gentle, mild-eyed creatures make ideal pets for children. Their care teaches lessons of gentleness and foresight. Their wants are few, and great the joy they give. Our own started with a single pair, but, as time went on, we found ourselves embarrassed by a constantly increasing company. The great problem at first was security, but soon we fashioned an abode proof from attack by day or night, and so they lived content. At first our colony could be kept down to reasonable proportions by gifts to unsuspecting friends, but soon that outlet failed, and now we are in a fair way to be overwhelmed. Once in a while, by some unforeseen event a wholesale jail-delivery occurs, and countless rabbits swarm the place. I prayerfully hope that many may seek asylum in adjacent woods and not return, but by far the greater part come back, not having found the wild places to their taste.

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It is during these periods that my garden suffers and my always doubtful popularity with my neighbors sinks to its lowest ebb. So when a flash of white, a pair of ears dart through my garden I content myself with shouts and harmless missiles badly thrown, for how can I tell that this tiny intruder is not some vagrant member of my own increasing flock?

There is one friend I have who seems to be part of my garden. He is a fellow worker too, a creature of rare tact, who calls but seldom. When in the twilight I catch sight of his squat black figure on the garden path I know my ally is afield. He seems a lonely soul, but quite content.

I wonder what the far-off recollections are that come to me when I behold a toad: faint pixy notions, sprites, hobgoblins and their ilk, and jewels too, a medley from the past. Why this small spot of black on business bent should send me off to fairyland, I do not know. But when the toad is near I always feel that fairy creatures are about me too. So, if I'm not observed, I fall into

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a habit that besets and hold strange converse with him. And I hear of grottos far and damp, where jewels are in heaps my shoulder high. A princess lies in durance vile guarded by shapeless oafs. He tells of mountain fastnesses where caldrons simmer and old witches croon, of tiny chargers with small knights a-mount, of glittering plumes, of rapiers and shields, of gallant deeds, of breathless chase, of song, of dance, of strange small lights that flicker on the moor. It is my fancy that he knows of these. And this is what a garden does to me; this small soft creature, only out for food, becomes a fabled creature of romance, and surely if in days like these a toad can strike the shackles from your mind and let you be a child in every thought, a toad is well worth while.

He hops away and leaves me desolate. A tinkle sounds within the little house. I answer it. "Yes, yes. I know that matter of the school. O, Lord! I never go to meetings. But my vote? Oh, yes, I'll come, but make it brief."

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As I ring off I'm asked, "Whom were you talking with just now out in the garden?"

"A friend," I say, "who called to bring me news."

"I hope it was not some stray dog. The garden suffers from too many friends."

I know that she is right. I must be stricter with these trespassers, all save the toad who toils for me.

But the fact is, I cannot find it in my heart to dispute possession of this fair spot with any fellow creature, especially with those little wild folk whose right is vastly better than my own. No paltry written deed, doubtless defective in essential details, vouches for their occupancy, but rather long inheritance and straight descent from the first owners. A soft and inefficient point of view, I know. It wins scant approval from my friend who styles himself a hard-headed business man. He's doubtless right, for I recall how once I battled in the marts of trade and how futile were my efforts to be like him, how weak and wavering were my policies, until I saw I was too soft and pliant

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to contest with him, and with what grace  
I could I then withdrew.

Since then, with what I have I live content. A dog, a horse, a cow, a pig or two, some fowl, and rabbits for full measure; with these I need not traffic or exchange; no trading this for that, no buying cheap and selling dear, no asking more than what I think is right. An empty life, you cry. Mayhap for you, but not for me. It is a life so full that half cannot be done.

And then, beside all these, a tiny house, well filled with kindred souls. Of these no words can tell, and it is well, for there are things of which no man may speak.

But in the garden that enshrines the house one may, with proper reverence, rejoice. For here the very essence of it all distills; here is the sign, the token of it all.

The sweet outdoors, the lure of husbandry; restrained and gentle though it be; the mystery of growth and fruitfulness; a beauty changing every hour, each day; the hours of tranquil joy and easy talk; the twilight with its hint of old romance; the

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nights, serene and fragrant, each with its mood to fill my brimming cup!

And so I sum my blessings up, and as I move about my small domain and visit each familiar spot and see once more the flowers and the beasts, in sheer content, with humble mind and thankful heart, I call them blessed, one and all.



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